

Remarks by Dr. Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
USS STERETT (DDG 104)
Commissioning Ceremony
Port of Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland
Saturday, August 9, 2008

Governor O'Malley, Senator Mikulski, Mrs. Bernson, Sterett family members, officers and crew of STERETT, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to be here today to commission a U.S. Navy warship that will carry the name of one of the great heroes in our Nation's history.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome aboard Mr. Sean Stackley, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition.

Congratulations on your Senate confirmation—it is great to have you on the team.

I am also particularly pleased that we are joined today by a number of Sterett family members, proud bearers of an illustrious name.

Included among them are Mr. Mac Sterett and his son Bill.

How Mac Sterett, as a rebellious 18-year old, joined the Navy and turned his life around is a story in itself, and it would certainly bring a knowing smile to the man whose name we honor today.

Thank you, Mr. Sterett, for coming today; thank you for your years of service; and thank you for following in the footsteps of a great American hero.

Lieutenant Andrew Sterett, born in the great city of Baltimore 248 years ago, epitomized the young breed of officers that led our young Navy in the decades that followed our Nation's birth.

Brash, expert with a sword and rifle, and eager to strike at our enemies, Andrew Sterett reflected the indomitable spirit of his fellow citizens, who, after all, had only recently thrown off the world's most powerful maritime power in their fight for independence.

“Don't tread on me!” was the flag that captured the American spirit of defiance and rebellion, and it spoke to the hearts of young Naval officers such as Andrew Sterett, Stephen Decatur, Edward Preble, and other heroes of that era.

Lieutenant Sterett is said to have boasted—only half-jokingly—that his expectations of his men were such that, quote, “We would put a man to death for even looking pale on board this ship.”

President Thomas Jefferson had found, in Lieutenant Sterett, just the kind of bold leader to command USS ENTERPRISE in its mission to defend American interests against the Barbary pirates who terrorized commercial vessels in transit across the Mediterranean Sea.

ENTERPRISE—a 12 gun schooner—was one of four ships that President Jefferson had ordered to the Mediterranean to, in his words, “repel force by force” and put an end to both Barbary terrorism and extortion.

On August 1, 1801, when the first battle of the Barbary War began, Sterett was only twenty-three years old.

The ENTERPRISE was enroute to Malta to replenish her supplies of fresh water when a lookout spotted a 14-gun corsair named the “Tripoli,” a pirate ship with a long record of plunder against the defenseless.

The ENTERPRISE was outgunned, but Lieutenant Sterett had relentlessly drilled his gunners on the voyage across the Atlantic in preparation for what would turn out to be an historic encounter.

U.S. Marines onboard ENTERPRISE pounded away at the Tripoli, and inflicted so many casualties that Tripoli lowered her flag in surrender.

But it was only a ruse, and Tripoli resumed fire once ENTERPRISE Marines had rushed onboard.

And that was a bad idea.

Tripoli had provoked the wrong man, and Sterett once again began a merciless assault on the wounded vessel.

Tripoli struck her flag again, indicating surrender.

Sterett held fire.

And once again “Tripoli” resumed firing of her canons, hoping against hope to strike a deadly blow against the ENTERPRISE.

Sterett’s rage was beyond description as ENTERPRISE then stood off and pounded “Tripoli” until her flag was lowered a third time.

Too late.

Sterett would have none of it, and he commanded his Marine gunners to sink her prey.

The first great battle of the Barbary War was over, with “Tripoli” destroyed, no casualties on the American side, and a new hero born.

Lieutenant Sterett’s courageous exploits and warfighting spirit were so inspiring that Thomas Jefferson praised him for upholding the honor of nations against those who, quote, “trample on the sacred faith of treaties, on the rights and laws of human nature.”

For the young lieutenant’s heroism in the Barbary war, four U.S. Navy ships have been named in honor of Andrew Sterett.

The first Sterett, DD-27, saw action in World War I, and her crew lived up to the ship’s namesake in its relentless pursuit of German U-boats off the coast of Ireland in 1918.

The second Sterett, DD-407, saw repeated action in World War II in both the Atlantic and the Pacific—most notably in the Battle of Guadalcanal, one of the most important battles in the history of the U.S. Navy.

The Naval Battle of Guadalcanal took place near the Solomon Islands in November 1942 and delivered a strategic blow against the Japanese—thanks to the magnificent performance of the Sailors and Marines under Admiral Bull Halsey, among them, the highly decorated warfighters onboard USS STERETT.

The third STERETT, DLG and then CG-31, saw repeated action in the Vietnam War, and carried out numerous sensitive missions in the Cold War as a reclassified cruiser.

It now falls to the officers and crew of DDG 104 to carry on the legendary Sterett name, and to honor the great legacy of those who served in the three previous STERETT’s.

In DDG 104, you are plankowners of a great ship that is the envy of the world.

The technology and capabilities of STERETT far exceeds those of the first of the Arleigh Burke class destroyers—DDG 51.

This warship has now evolved into a multi-mission platform that boasts our Navy’s premier air and missile defense capabilities.

When the debate over our Nation's development of missile defense capabilities ensued more than twenty years ago, some thought that the decision to integrate missile defense on an operational platform would constrain its development.

But in fact, the opposite was true.

That decision forced a discipline into the development process that turned out to be highly beneficial.

Indeed, it resulted in a highly reliable and capable missile defense system at sea.

It is a success story that we are proud to take advantage of.

STERETT—whether operating as part of a carrier strike group or as a disaggregated force in support of critical presence missions—will provide us with the air and missile defense capabilities that we need.

And, as we recognize the need to provide presence in support of maritime security and counter-piracy missions such as those carried out by Lieutenant Sterett more than 200 years ago, we welcome STERETT's contributions to the Fleet as part of those missions.

I salute every one of the crew for your service.

You follow in the footsteps of many great heroes in our history.

I urge you to show yourselves worthy of your ship's namesake.

Walk with pride knowing that you are privileged to be a part of one of the finest warships in the Fleet, and to serve in the world's greatest Navy.

America stands behind you as you carry on the proud tradition of Andrew Sterett—fearless and indomitable in defense of his ship, his Navy, and his Nation.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America.